

## Chapter 6

# The Nazi-Soviet Pact of August 23, 1939: When Did Stalin Decide to Align with Hitler, and Was Poland the Culprit?

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The official reason given by the Soviet government for the failure of Anglo-French-Soviet negotiations for a military and political alliance in late August 1939, was the refusal of Poland and Romania to allow the passage of Soviet troops through their territories in the event of a German attack on those countries. Soviet historians upheld that view, especially blaming Poland, but also accusing the Western powers of planning to set Germany against the USSR, and claiming that this situation gave Stalin no choice but to conclude a pact with Hitler.<sup>1</sup> Although microfilm copies of the secret protocol to the Nazi-Soviet Nonaggression Pact of August 23, 1939, were found in western Germany at war's end, and were published in the West, Soviet authorities and historians consistently denied the protocol's existence, as did the commissar for foreign affairs, Vyacheslav M. Molotov, who signed it.<sup>2</sup> It is clear, however, that high Soviet officials knew the German and Russian originals were

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1. For an early version of some of these charges, see Vyacheslav M. Molotov's speech to the Supreme Soviet of August 31, 1939: *God Krizisa, 1938–1939* (Moscow, 1990), vol. 2, [henceforth: GK 2] no. 620; Jane Degras, ed., *Soviet Documents on Foreign Policy*, vol. III [henceforth: Degras SDFP III] (Oxford, 1953), 363–371. For the old party line on 1939, see Boris Ponomarev et al., eds., *History of Soviet Foreign Policy, 1917–1945* (Moscow, 1969), ch. 11; and Vilnis Sipols, *Diplomatic Battles Before World War II* (Moscow, 1982), ch. IV. On standard Soviet treatments of interwar Polish foreign policy, see Anna M. Cienciala, "Marxism and History: Recent Polish and Soviet Interpretations of Polish Foreign Policy in the Era of Appeasement. An Evaluation," *East European Quarterly* 1, no. 1 (1967): 92–117.

2. Molotov, who signed the secret protocol along with Ribbentrop, told a Russian journalist: "There could not have been any such secret agreement. . . . I can assure you that this is unquestionably a fabrication." See Albert Resis, ed., *Molotov Remembers. Inside Kremlin Politics. Conversations with Felix Chuev* (Chicago 1993), 13.

kept in sealed envelopes in the Presidential Archives in the Kremlin where they were officially "discovered" in October 1992. Earlier, copies were found and verified in the archives, as admitted publicly in late December 1989.<sup>3</sup>

The lively debate that took place on the pact among Russian historians in 1989, and carried on in Russian works published in the next few years, showed two schools of thought: one close to the former official interpretation, defending Stalin's policy, while the second condemned it along with other aspects of Stalinism. The 1989 debate began before the official acknowledgment of the existence of the copies and subsequently the originals

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3. The first information on the negotiations for the secret protocol was given at the Nuremberg Trials by the lawyer defending Rudolf Hess, citing a deposition by the German Foreign Ministry legal expert, Friedrich Gauss, who was present at the negotiations, see Alfred Seidl, *Der Fall Rudolf Hess 1941-1987. Dokumentation des Verteidigers*, 3<sup>rd</sup>, expanded printing (Munich, 1988), 93-95. However, the Allied prosecutors agreed to the Soviet request that this evidence was inadmissible at the Nuremberg Trials.

On the history of the microfilm containing the secret protocol, see: Ingeborg Fleischhauer, *Der Pakt. Hitler, Stalin unter die Initiative der deutschen Diplomatie 1938-1939* (Berlin, Frankfurt-am-Main, 1990), note 139, 533-534. The Secret protocol of August 23, 1939, was first published in the British press by the *Manchester Guardian*, 30 May 1946. It was then published in *Nazi-Soviet Relations 1939-1941. Documents from the Archives of the German Foreign Office*, Washington, 1948, 78, and republished in *Documents on German Foreign Policy* (henceforth: DGFP) ser. D, vol. VII (London, Washington, 1956), no. 229; for the Russian texts see GK 2 (Moscow, 1990) nos. 602, 603 and *Dokumenty Vneshnei Politiki. Vol. XXII, 1939 god. Kniga I*, [henceforth: *DVP 1939 I*] (Moscow, 1992), no. 485.

On finding verified copies of the secret protocol, see Alexander N. Yakovlev's speech to the Second Congress of People's Deputies, December 24, 1989, Russian text, *Izvestiia*, December 25, 1989, reprinted in: O.A. Rzheshhevskii, ed., *1939 God. Urokii Istorii* [henceforth: *1939 God*] (Moscow, 1990), appendix, 492-493. For the Congress's condemnation of the secret protocols announced on December 25, see: Mikhail S. Gorbachev, *Pravda*, December 28, 1989, reprint in *1939 God*, 496-497; brief excerpt in *Current Digest of the Soviet Press*, 1990, no. 42, #09, 11.1; for the full text of the reports, see *On the Political and Legal Assessment of the Soviet-German Non-Aggression Treaty of 1939* (Moscow, 1990).

On the first discovery of original German and Russian copies of the secret protocol in the Russian Presidential Archives, when Gorbachev handed over power to Boris N. Yeltsin, see interview given by Yakovlev—who was present—to Michael Dobbs, in his: *Down with Big Brother. The Fall of the Soviet Empire* (New York, 1996), 447-448. On the discovery of the Secret protocol by Russian archivists and historians in October 1992, see Dmitri Volkogonov, *Autopsy for an Empire. The Seven Leaders Who Built the Soviet Regime*, trans. and ed. Harold Shukman (New York and London), 1998, 528, cf. Lev Bezymensky, "The Secret Protocols of 1939 as a Problem of Soviet Historiography," in Gabriel Gorodetsky, ed., *Soviet Foreign Policy 1917-1991. A Retrospective* (London, 1994), 83-84.

of the secret protocol, though a selection of German and Soviet documents published that year clearly impelled this acknowledgment. Nevertheless, many Russian historians still believe that Western appeasement of Germany, and the Soviet need for time, left Stalin no other option than the pact with Hitler to ensure the country's security.<sup>4</sup>

The policy of the Polish government, touted by Soviet historiography as the decisive factor in the failure of Soviet-Western military negotiations in August 1939, was viewed in the same way by some Western participants. Thus, in the memoirs of Sir Robert Strang (then assistant secretary for foreign affairs and head of the Central Department of the Foreign Office, who assisted the British ambassador in Moscow, Sir William Seeds, from mid-June to early August 1939), Warsaw's refusal of the Soviet demand for the passage of the Red Army through Poland was presented as the decisive factor in the breakdown of the negotiations.<sup>5</sup> This was also the view of French captain (later general) André Beaufre, a member of the French contingent in the Anglo-French military mission in Moscow.<sup>6</sup> He was sent to Warsaw to help persuade the Polish government to accept the Soviet demand; years later, he still believed the Polish refusal led to the breakdown of negotiations. However, two key British participants who were in Moscow at the time, thought otherwise. General T. G. Heywood, head of the army section of the British military delegation, thought France and Britain never had a chance because the Russians had been playing both sides to get the highest price, and the British ambassador, Sir William Seeds, was happy

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4. For a brief survey of the debate among Russian historians, see: M.I. Mel'miukhov, "Predyistoriia Velikoi Otechestvennoi Voiny v sovremennykh diskussiiakh," in G.A. Bordiagov, ed., *Istoricheskie Issledovaniia v Rossii. Tendentsii poslednikh let* (Moscow, 1996), 278-307; on 1939, *ibid.*, 278-283. For a condemnation of Stalin for signing the pact, see: V.L. Doroshenko, "Stalinskaia provokatsiia vtoroi mirovoi voiny," in: *Drugaia Voina 1939-1945* (Moscow), 1996, 60-72; Lev I. Ginzburg, "Sovetsko-Germanskii pakt: Zamysel i ego realizatsiia," *Otechestvennaia Istoriiia*, no. 3 (1996), 29-40; and M. I. Semiriaga, *Tainy stalinskoi diplomatsii, 1939-1941* (Moscow, 1992), an earlier version of which appeared as "Sovetsko-Germanskiie dogovorennosti v 1939—iunie 1941: Vzgliad istorika," *Sovetskie Gosudarstvo i Pravo*, no.9 (1989), 92-104.

5. Lord Strang, *At Home and Abroad* (London, 1956), 189-190. Strang had been the British chargé d'affaires in Moscow in the early 1930s. For a brief biographical sketch, see Donald Cameron Watt, *How War Came. The Immediate Origins of the Second World War, 1938-1939* (London, 1989), 361-362.

6. For Beaufre's account of his mission to Warsaw, see General [André] Beaufre, *Mémoires 1920-1940-1945* (Paris, 1965), 144-151.

to accuse Molotov of bad faith to his face.<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, Western historians generally sided with Suang and Beaufre. A quarter of a century after the Moscow negotiations, the British historian, A. J. P. Taylor, a defender of British appeasement, condemned Polish foreign policy for being unreasonable and for pretending to great power status, while he credited the USSR with the intention of attacking Germany in case of war. He blamed the Western powers and Poland for the failure of negotiations with Moscow, and contended that the Nazi-Soviet pact was neither an alliance nor a partition of Poland.<sup>8</sup> Although Taylor's views were more extreme than most, Western historians generally agreed that the Poles were either partly or largely to blame for the failure of the Anglo-French-Soviet negotiations and, thus, for the conclusion of the Nazi-Soviet Nonaggression Pact.

As mentioned earlier, in 1989, on the fiftieth anniversary of the outbreak of World War II, much was written about the pact in Russia, but positive interpretations of Stalin's policy held a significant edge. There was no such debate in the West; indeed, the vast majority of Western historical periodicals did not even discuss it. British historians and writers who did so, generally agreed that Stalin had no other option but to align with Hitler, and castigated Poland for her refusal to accept Soviet troops into its territory. Thus, two journalist-historians, Anthony Reed and David Fisher, approvingly cited journalist-historian William Shirer to the effect that Polish "self-destructiveness" had been responsible for the partitions of Poland in the late eighteenth century, and that the Poles were guilty of "willful blindness" in refusing to consider Soviet demands for Red Army passage in August 1939. To this, the two authors added their own disparaging comment: "Like the three little pigs, the Poles still frolicked inside their straw house while the big bad wolf was already drawing breath on the outside."<sup>9</sup>

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7. For general T. G. Heywood's opinion, see point 8 in his letter of August 23 to the Director of Military Operations and Intelligence, *Documents on British Foreign Policy* [henceforth: DBFP], 3<sup>rd</sup> series, vol. VII (London, 1954), app. II, no. 6, 607. For Seeds to Molotov on bad faith, see Seeds to Halifax, August 29, 1939, in D.C. Watt, ed., *British Documents on Foreign Affairs: Reports and Papers from the Foreign Office Confidential Print*, Part II, Series A. *The Soviet Union 1917-1939*, vol. 15 (Lanham, MD., 1986), 144.

8. For examples of Taylor's disparaging opinion of Foreign Minister Józef Beck and Polish foreign policy, see *The Origins of the Second World War* (London, 1961), 80-81, 251; on the Nazi-Soviet Pact, 262. For a penetrating critique of Taylor's views on Poland, see Piotr S. Wandycz, "Poland between East and West," ch. 8 in Gordon Martel, ed., *The Origins of the Second World War Reconsidered. The A.J.P. Taylor Debate After Twenty-Five Years* (Boston, London, Sydney, 1986), 187-209.

9. Anthony Reed and David Fisher, *The Deadly Embrace. Hitler, Stalin, and the Nazi-Soviet Pact, 1939-1941* (New York and London, 1988), 214-215. William L. Shirer (1904-93) was the Universal News Service correspondent in Berlin, 1934-37, also Columbia Broadcasting Service correspondent in Vienna, 1935-37, Prague

On a scholarly level, the leading German historian of Soviet-German relations in 1938–39, Ingeborg Fleischhauer, contended that the Polish refusal to allow the passage of Soviet troops eliminated Moscow's option of an alliance with the Western powers. However, some German historians disagreed. They perceived Stalin's goal as either expanding communism after an exhausting European war in which the USSR would be neutral, or as Soviet territorial expansion, or a combination of both.<sup>10</sup>

After the publication in 1990–1992 of Soviet diplomatic documents for 1939,<sup>11</sup> most Western historians still hewed to their previous views. Thus, British historian Geoffrey Roberts concluded that, while an agreement with Nazi Germany was always an option for Stalin, "not until the final breakdown of the military negotiations with Britain and France were the Germans invited to cross the threshold." He claimed that this was an act of desperation on Stalin's part, and also endorsed Taylor's view of the Nazi-Soviet pact.<sup>12</sup> Another British historian, Jonathan Haslam, had concluded earlier (1984) that:

Confronted with the evident unwillingness of the Entente to provide immediate, concrete, and water-tight guarantees for Soviet security in Europe, let alone in Asia . . . the Russians were left with little alternative but an agreement with Germany creating a condominium in Eastern Europe. Nonetheless, the Nazi-Soviet pact was unquestionably the second best solution.<sup>13</sup>

Haslam thought that Stalin kept his options open until it was clear that the Anglo-French military delegation was not ready to grant Soviet demands.

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and Berlin, 1937–40, then war correspondent 1941–45; see his *Berlin Diary, 1934–1941* (New York, 1941), and *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich* (New York, 1961). He was very critical of Polish foreign policy, particularly with regard to the USSR.

10. Ingeborg Fleischhauer, "Soviet Foreign Policy and the Origins of the Hitler-Stalin Pact," in Bernd Wegner, ed., *From Peace to War. Germany, Soviet Russia and the World, 1939–1941* (Oxford, 1997), 31, 43. For the view that Stalin aimed to expand communism after a European war, see Gottfried Schramm, "Basic Features of German Ostpolitik, 1918–1939," Wegner, *ibid.*, 24; for a similar view, see Rolf Ahmann, "Der Hitler-Stalin Pakt: Nichtangriffs- und Angriffsvertrag?" in: Erwin Oberländer, ed., *Hitler-Stalin Pakt 1939: Das Ende Mitteleuropas?* (Frankfurt-am-Main, 1989), 26–42; and Jorg K. Hoensch, *ibid.*, 50.

11. See note 3 above. *DVP 1939 I* contains more new Russian documents than *God Krizisa*, published in 1990.

12. Geoffrey Roberts, *The Soviet Union and the Origins of the Second World War. Russo-German Relations and the Road to War, 1933–1941* (New York, 1995), 86, 92. For an earlier work by this author, with similar conclusions, see *The Unholy Alliance. Stalin's Pact with Hitler* (Bloomington, IN., 1989).

13. Jonathan Haslam, *The Soviet Union and the Struggle for Collective Security in Europe, 1933–1939* (New York, 1984), 231.

However, in 1994, he concluded that Stalin had opted for Hitler as early as the dismissal of Maxim M. Litvinov from the post of commissar of foreign affairs in early May 1939. This view is shared by some Russian historians, for example, Lev I. Ginzberg.<sup>14</sup> Fleischhauer contends, however, that Stalin finally made up his mind on August 21, when it was clear that the British and French delegations had no answer to give on the passage of Soviet troops through Poland and Romania. An American historian, Teddy Uldricks, rejects all existing theories in favor of the simple explanation that Stalin was a realist and sought security wherever he could find it, a view shared by Gabriel Gorodetsky.<sup>15</sup> According to Canadian historian Michael Jabara Carlay, [Foreign Minister Józef] "Beck was the *bête noire* of just about everyone in Europe" and "... Litvinov regarded him as a Nazi pimp." [sic]. Finally, Carlay writes: "Polish opposition to collective security and Polish collusion with Nazi Germany immensely irritated Soviet and French diplomats and led ultimately to Poland's disappearance."<sup>16</sup> As for the Poles, most have always believed—as did the Polish government in August 1939—that Stalin wanted to stay out of the war, preferred a deal with Hitler, and deliberately double-crossed France and Britain. This was also the view of exiled Polish historians, shared later by their colleagues in Poland when they could write freely on the subject after the collapse of communism in 1989.<sup>17</sup> However, with the exception of some German scholars, Gerhard L. Weinberg, the leading American historian of Nazi foreign policy, and Donald Cameron Watt, the premier British diplomatic historian of this period, most Western historians still see the Nazi-Soviet pact as

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14. Haslam: "Litvinov, Stalin and the Road not Taken," in Gorodetsky, ed., *Soviet Foreign Policy*, 58; also Ginzburg, "Sovetsko-germanskii pakt," 30. However, the majority view is expressed by Vladimir Sokolov: "The question of Litvinov's resignation was ripe for decision if the Soviet government did not intend to pursue a policy oriented to Britain and France, but an independent policy meeting the country's national rather than ideological needs." Sokolov, "People's Commissar Maxim Litvinov," *International Affairs*, no. 5, (Moscow, 1991): 93–107.

15. Fleischhauer, *Der Pakt*, 339; Teddy J. Uldricks, "Soviet Security in the 1930s," in Gorodetsky, *Soviet Foreign Policy*, 73; see also Gabriel Gorodetsky, *Grand Illusion. Stalin and the German Invasion of Russia* (New Haven and London, 1999), 8–9.

16. Michael Jabara Carlay, 1939: *The Alliance That Never Was And The Coming Of World War II* (Chicago, 1999), p. 68.

17. Władysław Pobóg-Malinowski, *Najnowsza historia polityczna Polski, 1864–1945*, vol. II, 1864–1939 (London, 1956, reprint Warsaw, 1981), ch. 22; Stanisław Gregorowicz, Michał J. Zacharias, *Polska—Związek Sowiecki. Stosunki polityczne 1925–1939* (Warsaw, 1995), ch. XV; Wojciech Materski, *Tarcza Europy. Stosunki polsko-sowieckie 1918–1939* (Warsaw, 1994), ch. VI, section 5.

either the only, or at least the logical, choice for Stalin.<sup>18</sup> Most historians also view the demand for Red Army passage through Poland as natural, and see the Polish refusal as either key to the breakdown of Franco-British military negotiations with the USSR, or at least a significant contributing factor. In contrast to the above, the goal of this paper is to demonstrate that most of the available evidence indicates Stalin always preferred a pact with Germany, and that he used negotiations with the Western powers to pressure Hitler into an agreement with the USSR. Finally, it will also show that Poland did not play any significant role in Stalin's decision to sign the nonaggression pact with Nazi Germany.

It is, of course, true that the Poles distrusted the Soviet Union. This was not surprising, given Russia's role in the partitions of Poland, and then her oppressive rule over her share of Polish lands.<sup>19</sup> After World War I, Lenin's attempt to destroy the reborn Polish state was foiled by Marshal Józef Piłsudski in the Battle of the Vistula in mid-August 1920. This defeat rankled deep with the Russians, together with great resentment at the loss of western Ukraine and western Belorussia to Poland in the Treaty of Riga (March 18, 1921).<sup>20</sup> As for the Poles, they distrusted both of their great neighbors

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18. On these German historians, see note 10 above. According to Gerhard L. Weinberg, "A war between Germany and the Western Powers looked to the Soviet leader like the best prospect for both the safety and the future expansion of Soviet power," Germany, *Hitler and World War II. Essays in Modern German History* (Cambridge, England, 1995), 176. D. C. Watt distributes blame for the failure of the Moscow negotiations equally between the British and the French on the one side and the Soviets on the other. However, he adds the proviso that having a paid Soviet spy in the foreign office communications center (Francis Herbert King), and a master spy in Japan (Richard Sorge), the director of Soviet negotiations with Britain and Germany was "like a poker player with marked cards." Watt suspects the conviction that Hitler's main targets were Britain and France was central to Soviet policy, *How War Came*, 231, 369.

19. For Poland under Russian rule and national uprisings, see Piotr S. Wandycz, *The Lands of Partitioned Poland, 1795–1918* (Seattle, WA, and London, 1974); and Norman Davies, *God's Playground. A History of Poland. Vol. II. 1795 to the Present* (New York, 1982), ch. 2.

20. For the diplomatic history of the Soviet-Polish War, see Wandycz, *Soviet-Polish Relations 1917–1921* (Cambridge, MA., 1969); on the military side, see Norman Davies, *White Eagle, Red Star. The Polish-Soviet War, 1919–20* (London, 1972). For Lenin's statements at a closed session of the Ninth Party Conference on September 22, 1920 (first published in Russia in 1992), on the reasons for the Soviet rejection of the Curzon Line and the decision to advance into Poland, see Richard Pipes, *Russia under the Bolshevik Regime* (New York, 1993), 181–183. For the Treaty of Riga, see *Documents on Polish-Soviet Relations 1939–1945*, vol. 1. 1939–1943 [henceforth: *DPSR*] (London, 1961), no. 3.

and conducted their foreign policy accordingly. In view of German claims to Polish western territories and the well known, if muted, Soviet claims to eastern Poland, the cardinal principle of interwar Polish foreign policy was "equilibrium" or nonalignment with either neighboring power, but maintaining equilibrium between them. This policy was bolstered by an alliance with France to secure the latter's aid in case of war with Germany, and a defensive alliance with Romania in case of war with the USSR. The equilibrium policy was characterized by the Polish-Soviet Nonaggression Treaty (1932) and the Declaration of Nonaggression with Germany (1934, for ten years), after which the Polish-Soviet treaty was extended for ten years.<sup>21</sup> However, due to Hitler's policy of courting Warsaw, Polish relations were more amicable with Berlin than with Moscow from 1934 until March 1939. The agreement with Berlin recognized Poland's existing alliances, that is, with France and Romania. Thus, equilibrium was a well known Polish policy, which was reiterated to Moscow several times in the course of the fateful spring and summer of 1939.<sup>22</sup>

Poland's distrust of the USSR was shared by the European peoples who had been subject to Russia in the past; that is: Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and also by Romania whose possession of Bessarabia was never recognized by the USSR. The Soviet Union was also distrusted by most West European statesmen, who saw their views confirmed by Soviet declarations and official statements, especially Stalin's speech to the Eighteenth Party Congress on March 10. He then declared Soviet readiness to help victims of aggression—but also accused France and Britain of setting Germany against the USSR and said the Soviet Union would not pull chestnuts out of the fire for other powers.<sup>23</sup>

Two days after Hitler's destruction of the Czechoslovak state (March 15, 1939), and with rumors flying of a German threat to Romania, the British inquired whether Moscow would declare its readiness to aid Romania in case of aggression. The Soviet government, in turn, proposed a conference in Bucharest for joint consultation.<sup>24</sup> This was turned down by the

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21. For the texts of the Polish-Soviet nonaggression pact of July 25, 1932 and its ten-year extension on May 5, 1934, see *DPSR*, nos. 6, 10; for the Polish-German Declaration of Nonaggression of January 26, 1934, see *DGFP*, C, vol. II (London and Washington, 1959), no. 291.

22. For a brief study of interwar Polish foreign policy, see Anna M. Cienciala, "Polish Foreign Policy, 1926–1939; 'Equilibrium,' Stereotype and Reality," *Polish Review*, vol. XX, no. 1 (1975): 42–58.

23. For extracts from Stalin's speech of March 10, 1939 to the Eighteenth Congress of the Soviet Communist Party, see Degras, *SDFP*, III, 315–322.

24. For the British inquiry, see Foreign Secretary Viscount Halifax to Ambassador Seeds, March 17, *DBFP*, 3rd ser., vol. IV (London, 1951), no. 389; for Seeds' conversation with Litvinov on March 18, and his report on Litvinov's proposals of



British government, which proposed, on March 21, a declaration on consultation in case of a threat of further aggression to France, the USSR, Poland, and Romania. The Polish government refused to sign because, as the Polish foreign minister claimed, Poland's signature alongside the USSR would provoke a German attack on her. The real motives, however, were both distrust of Moscow and the goal of keeping the door open to a compromise settlement of the Danzig-Corridor question with Germany, which would be compatible with Poland's security and independence. Instead of signing the declaration, Beck proposed a secret Anglo-Polish agreement on consultation, which the British accepted. This led to the conclusion of a provisional agreement on mutual assistance, signed on April 6, during Beck's visit to Britain. Beck explained the Polish position to Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain saying that the Poles had no confidence in Soviet Russia. On the basis of their experience, they saw no difference between Soviet and Tsarist imperialism, but in the face of the German threat they thought it advisable that, at a minimum, Russia's neutrality should be secured. They did not believe that Russia would honestly join Poland's allies, but they would not oppose British and French efforts to reach an understanding with Moscow. Beck added that, as in the case of the negotiations for the Franco-Soviet alliance (1935), the Polish government would insist that no treaty concluded by its Western allies without their participation could impose any obligations on Poland. But he also declared the Poles would welcome any Allied agreement with the Soviets, which would allow the transit of military supplies and the delivery of Soviet raw materials to Poland.<sup>25</sup>

The Polish attitude toward the USSR was based, not only on memories of the past and hopes of a peaceful resolution of disputes with Germany,

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March 19, *ibid.*, nos. 403, 421; for the Russian text of the Soviet proposal of March 18, see Litvinov to Stalin, DVP 1939 I, no. 150, also Litvinov to Soviet ambassadors in London and Paris, March 18, 1939, *Soviet Peace Efforts on the Eve of World War II* [henceforth: SPE] (Moscow, 2nd printing, 1976), no. 109. For British documents on the Declaration on Consultation, see DBFP, *ibid.*, chapter V.

25. See annotated edition of Józef Beck's memoirs: *Polska polityka zagraniczna w latach 192-1939. Na podstawie tekstów min. Józefa Becka opracowała Anna M. Cienciala* Paris, (1990), 245-246; cf. the French edition of Beck's memoirs, Colonel Józef Beck, *Dernier Rapport. Politique polonaise 1926-1939* (Neuchâtel and Paris, 1951), 93-194; English edition, *Final Report* (New York, 1957). For British records of Beck's London talks, see DBFP, 3<sup>rd</sup> Ser., vol. V (London, 1952), nos. 1,2,10, 16, also Cienciala, *Poland and the Western Powers 1938-1939. A Study in the Interdependence of Eastern and Western Europe* (London, Toronto, 1968), 216-217. This work was based on Polish archival documents in the *Polish Institute and Sikorski Museum*, London (henceforth PISM), also on published British, French, German, and Italian documents available at that time. For a later study of the topic in 1939, based on Polish and other archival documents, see Cienciala article cited in note 41 below.

but also on certain key assumptions, some of which were shared by non-Polish observers. Thus, from Warsaw's point of view, a German-Soviet alliance was seen as most unlikely for ideological reasons, which was, incidentally, also the view prevalent in the West. Furthermore, from the military point of view, the Poles did not expect the USSR to participate in any offensive action against Germany because the Soviet officer corps had been decapitated by the purge of 1937—a view shared by both the French and British General Staffs. Finally, the Poles thought a German-Soviet partition of Poland would be unacceptable to the Soviets because it would bring the formidable German army and air force that much nearer to Moscow, thus posing a mortal threat to Soviet security—a view shared by many Western observers, though some entertained such a possibility. Therefore, the Poles expected a German attack on their country to bring them automatic Soviet aid.<sup>26</sup> They were confirmed in their views by Soviet statements that the USSR would supply Poland with raw materials—at least, within the framework of the trade agreement signed in February 1939, ratified on May 16—and probably with military supplies and air support in case of a German-Polish war.<sup>27</sup>

However, friendly public declarations aside, the Soviet attitude toward Poland was characterized by profound hostility and suspicion. Moscow's attempts to pin down the Polish government on the declaration of consultation seem to have been designed less to elicit Polish agreement than to document an expected Polish refusal. Thus, Litvinov told Seeds on March 21 that he was sure Poland would not accept the commitments under the declaration on consultation in case of further German aggression, as proposed by London. He also confided to French Chargé d'Affaires Jean Payart, on March 29, that he felt Beck's "line" was unlikely to change until Poland received a direct blow. Despite these views, the Soviet government made

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26. The opinion of the Polish ambassador to the USSR, Wacław Grzybowski, was typical. He told Undersecretary of State, Jan Szembek, on June 26, 1939, that he did not believe the rumors of German-Soviet talks because Moscow could not permit a German victory over Poland, and thus have Germany as a neighbor, see Jan Żarąński, ed., *Diariusz i Teki Jana Szembeka, 1935–1939*, vol. IV (London, 1972), 641. This was also the policy evaluation given by the Polish General Staff to Col. Stefan Brzeszczyński, Polish military attaché in Moscow, when he visited Warsaw in early June, see Brzeszczyński report to the War Minister, Paris, December 31, 1939, Kol. 79, *PISM*. On June 29, the U.S. chargé d'affaires in Moscow reported a similar statement by a member of the Polish embassy; see *Foreign Relations of the United States. Diplomatic Papers. 1939. Vol. I. General*, [henceforth *FRUS 1939 I*] (Washington, D.C., 1956), 196.

27. For the Polish-Soviet trade agreement of February 19, ratified on May 16, 1939, see *Dokumenty i materiały do historii stosunków polsko-radzieckich*, vol. VII, January 1939–December 1943, [henceforth: *DiM VII*] (Warsaw, 1973), nos. 12–17, 63–64.

Poland's signature—along with that of France—the condition for its own adherence to the declaration.<sup>28</sup> One may well ask why Moscow insisted that Poland sign the declaration on consultation, if she was expected not to do so? Perhaps Stalin saw this as a test of whether Britain and France would force Poland to sign? Whatever the case may be, Soviet Deputy Commissar for Foreign Affairs Vladimir P. Potemkin did not, as is sometimes claimed, offer a mutual assistance pact to the Polish foreign minister when they met in Warsaw on May 10, 1939. This was five days after Beck's speech to the Polish Parliament, in which he answered Hitler's statements of April 28. Beck declared Poland's determination to not be cut off from the Baltic Sea, but at the same time, Polish desire for peace—though not at any price, and especially not at the price of honor. Molotov instructed Potemkin to stop in the Polish capital on his way home from a tour of the Balkans and Turkey because Beck had expressed a desire to see him. Potemkin's main task was to learn what was going on between Poland and Germany, but Molotov also authorized him to "hint" at possible Soviet aid to Poland. According to Potemkin's brief, published telegram, that is all he did, saying the USSR would not refuse assistance to Poland if she desired it.<sup>29</sup>

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28. See Seeds to Halifax, March 21, 1939, DBFP, 3<sup>rd</sup> ser. vol. IV (London, 1951), no. 461; Litvinov's report does not include his remark on Poland, GK, 1, no. 209. In his telegram of March 21 to Soviet ambassadors in Britain and France, Litvinov stated the Soviet government would sign the declaration as soon as France and Poland promised their signatures, SPE no. 122, GK 1, no. 215 and SVP 1939 I, no. 162. For Litvinov's remark to Payart, see extract in: SPE, no. 132, 226, not included in published Russian and French documents. For Litvinov's and Potemkin's conversations with Polish Ambassador Grzybowski regarding Poland's signature of the declaration, see DiM VII, nos. 32, 37, 42, 43, 46; also GK. 1, nos. 226, 251, and DVP 1939, I, nos. 183, 189.

29. For Beck's speech of May 5, 1939, see *The Polish White Book. Official Documents concerning Polish-German and Polish-Soviet Relations 1933-1939* [henceforth PWB] (London and New York, 1940), no. 77. By saying Poland wanted peace but "not at the price of honor," Beck meant giving up Polish independence without a fight. His speech, prepared in consultation with the British government, answered Hitler's speech of April 28, in which the latter denounced the Anglo-German Naval Treaty of 1935, and the Polish-German Declaration of Nonaggression, and listed the proposals Poland had rejected, i.e., the return of Danzig and part of the Polish Corridor to the Reich in exchange for German recognition of the Polish-German frontier, saying he would never offer them again. For Molotov's instruction to Potemkin, May 10, 1939, see DVP, 1939, I, no. 293; for Potemkin's brief telegram on his conversation with Beck that day, see SPE, no. 210; for the same text in Russian, see DiM, VII, no. 60, GK 1, no. 330. Fleischhauer interprets Potemkin's remarks as a proposal for a Polish-Soviet assistance pact, which was rejected, see her article in Wegner, ed., *From Peace to War*, 34. Elsewhere she writes that Beck's declarations to Potemkin were "a bitter pill" for the Russians, who had hoped for an assistance pact with Poland, *Der Pakt*, 188. There is no documented evidence of a Moscow proposal for a Soviet-Polish assistance pact, or of Russian hopes for same.

Whatever else Potemkin may have said, he managed to give Beck the impression that Moscow understood Poland's nonalignment policy, and that the Poles would never attack the USSR in tandem with Germany. Beck also noted Potemkin's statement that Moscow would adopt a policy of benevolent neutrality in case of a Polish-German war.<sup>30</sup> By this time, of course, Litvinov had been replaced as commissar for foreign affairs by Molotov (May 3), and Anglo-French-Soviet negotiations were proceeding toward a treaty guaranteeing the USSR's western neighbors against German aggression. In order to avoid any misunderstandings of Beck's statements to Potemkin, Ambassador Grzybowski clarified the Polish position to Molotov the following day. He read to him the instruction just received from Warsaw: (1) Poland did not agree with, nor authorize, the French initiative regarding guarantees to Poland; (2) she could not accept a one-sided Soviet guarantee, nor a mutual guarantee because, if she were totally engaged in a conflict with Germany, she could not aid the Soviet Union; (3) the Polish attitude toward collective negotiations would depend on the results of the Anglo-French-Soviet negotiations, but Poland rejected all discussion of matters affecting her other than by bilateral methods; (4) the Polish-Romanian alliance was purely defensive, so it could not be regarded as in any way directed against the USSR.<sup>31</sup>

It is not known what Potemkin actually reported to Molotov when he returned to Moscow because this document is not accessible as yet. It is known, however, that when the new Soviet ambassador to Warsaw, Nikolai I. Sharonov, took up his post in late May, he also professed Soviet friend-

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30. On May 13, Beck wrote Juliusz Lukaszewicz, the Polish ambassador in Paris, that conversations with Potemkin on May 10 made it clear the Soviet government understood the Polish point of view on relations with the USSR, and realized the Polish government did not intend to reach agreement with either great neighbor against the other. Beck wrote: "Mr. Potemkin also stated that in the event of an armed conflict between Poland and Germany, the Soviets will adopt 'une attitude bienveillante' towards us.," *PWB* no. 163, *DPSR* no.19. Beck confirmed this statement in his memoirs. He also noted that the new Soviet ambassador [Nikolai Sharonov] told him a few days later that Molotov had studied Potemkin's report several times and judged the conversation to be very positive, saying: "I quite understand Colonel Beck"—to which the latter answered he still understood Molotov quite well, see: Beck (Cienciala, ed.), *Polska polityka zagraniczna*, 253.

31. For Grzybowski's statement to Molotov, May 11, see *SPE*, no.212, Russian text: *DiM*, VII, no. 62, *GK* 1, no. 336, *DVP*, 1939, I, no. 298; see also Grzybowski's "Final Report," Paris, November 6, 1939, *PWB*, no.184, reprinted with some abbreviations in *DPSR*, no. 69. "French initiatives" meant French efforts aimed at the conclusion of a triple alliance between France, Britain, and the USSR involving Poland, but not necessarily with the latter's agreement.

ship for Poland and hinted at Moscow's readiness to help Poland.<sup>32</sup> This and similar declarations may have been designed to support Polish determination to resist German demands by force, but it is clear Sharonov did not believe the Poles would really do so. His report to Molotov of August 23 probably reflected not only his opinion but also the views of the Soviet leadership throughout the spring and summer of 1939. Sharonov wrote that Poland was preparing to bow to England's peace policy, if she had not already done so; therefore a German-Polish war over Danzig was unlikely.<sup>33</sup>

It should be borne in mind that Stalin's decision to sign the nonaggression pact with Nazi Germany, however astounding to most contemporaries, had solid historical precedents. Russia and Prussia, later Germany, had enjoyed friendly relations for most of the period 1772-1914, and this relationship—in which the Austrian Empire was the third partner—was founded on the partitions of Poland. After the Bolshevik seizure of power in November 1917, came the peace of Brest-Litovsk with the Central Powers in March 1918, in which Lenin gave up the western provinces of the former Russian Empire rather than continue the war and thus risk losing power. The peace allowed Germany to launch powerful offensives on the western front, but her ultimate defeat nullified the peace of Brest-Litovsk. In April 1922, the Rapallo Treaty normalized German-Soviet relations and canceled mutual claims, while the Treaty of Berlin, signed four years later, was in essence a nonaggression agreement between the two countries. Until the advent of Hitler, relations were very good and military cooperation flourished. Even after Hitler terminated the latter in fall 1933, trade relations continued. Indeed, Stalin, in his report to the Seventeenth Congress of the CPSU on January 26, 1934 (the day the Polish-German Declaration of Nonaggression was signed), said that fascism was not the issue, for it did not prevent good Soviet relations with Italy. This policy line led to the

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32. Ambassador Sharonov reported on May 25, that he told Beck the Soviet Union would be willing to help Poland if the latter was attacked by Germany, but that earlier talks were necessary to make such help possible, *DiM VII*, no. 66, *GK I*, no. 373, *DVP 1939*, I, no. 334. On presenting his credentials to Polish President Ignacy Mościcki on June 2, Sharonov said his mission was to support and develop friendly Polish-Soviet relations based on a series of mutual political and economic agreements. Close and fruitful cooperation between the two countries was, he said, a factor in the consolidation of universal peace and it was in keeping with Soviet policy to have peaceful and friendly relations with all countries, especially with its neighbors, see *PWB*, no. 165, *DiM VII*, no. 70. This was two days after Molotov's speech to the Supreme Soviet, in which he used the same phrases on Soviet relations with Poland, see: Degras, *SDFP*, III, 337.

33. Sharonov's report of August 23, 1939, *DVP 1939*, I, no. 489; on Poland and Germany, *ibid.*, p. 640.

conclusion of a German-Soviet trade-credit agreement in early April 1935, whereby Germany gave the Soviet Union a credit of two hundred million RM to purchase German manufactured goods in return for Soviet raw materials.<sup>34</sup> While trade continued, German-Soviet relations deteriorated but Litvinov (perceived then as now as the champion of collective security) declared publicly in December 1937 that collective security was dead and that a rapprochement between the Soviet Union and Germany was perfectly possible.<sup>35</sup>

Whether or not the Nazi-Soviet pact of 1939 was mainly the result of efforts by those German Foreign Ministry officials who wanted a return to Rapallo, as Fleischhauer contends,<sup>36</sup> it is clear that such a return was desired by some members of the German diplomatic and military establishment. All available evidence points to the fact that this was also the Soviet goal. However, the question of when Stalin decided to pursue it is still a matter of debate because authoritative Russian documentation is lacking. The most important source for his policy decisions might well be the records of discussions in Stalin's "Kremlin Cabinet." This body consisted, in order of importance, of Stalin; Molotov, Politburo member, head of the Sovnarkom (Council of National Commissars), and from early May, commissar for foreign affairs; Andrei A. Zhdanov, head of the Leningrad party organization and Politburo member in charge of ideology; Anastas I. Mikoyan, Politburo member and deputy premier in charge of foreign and domestic trade; Lazar M. Kaganovich, Politburo member in charge of agriculture;

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34. For documents on German-Soviet military cooperation, see Yuri Dyakov & Tatyana Bushuyeva, *The Red Army and the Wehrmacht. How the Soviets Militarized Germany, 1922-1933, and Paved the Way for Fascism* (New York, 1995). For Stalin on Germany, January 26, 1934, Degras, *SDFP*, III, 70. For the German-Soviet trade agreement signed April 9, 1935, see: *DGFP C IV* (London and Washington, 1962), nos. 20, 21.

35. For Litvinov on collective security as dead, see his interview with the Moscow correspondent of *Le Monde*, late December 1937, cit. Hugh D. Phillips, *Between the Revolution and the West. A Political Biography of Maxim M. Litvinov* (Boulder, CO., 1992), 163; French text, Ambassador Robert Coulondre to Premier Yvon Delbos, December 27, 1937, Documents *Diplomatiques Français* [henceforth: *DDF*], 2<sup>nd</sup> ser. vol. VII (Paris, 1972), no. 30, enclosure, "Note de M. Luciani."

36. Fleischhauer claims that Stalin's remark on not pulling chestnuts out of the fire for others in his speech of March 10, 1939, was taken up by the "old" Wilhelmstrasse officials, who built on this phrase to pursue the German national interest as they saw it, and worked to get Ribbentrop's support for a deal with Soviet Russia—see Fleischhauer in Wegner, ed., *From Peace to War*, 33. This is also the theme of her major work, *Der Pakt*.

Lavrenty P. Beria, candidate member of the Politburo, commissar of the NKVD (National Commissariat of Internal Security); Marshal Kliment Y. Voroshilov, member of the Politburo and commissar for military and naval affairs, also others as needed. Selected officials, including Molotov, who was nearly always present, met almost every night with the "Vozhd" (leader) in his Kremlin office to discuss current problems and policy. However, only the dates and lists of visitors for each day are available. Aside from the lack of these records, Politburo, Central Committee, Foreign Affairs Commissariat documents, also NKVD and GRU (Military Intelligence) documents illustrating Soviet foreign policy decision-making are missing from the Russian sources published thus far, and are still inaccessible in Russian archives.<sup>37</sup>

In the absence of authoritative documents on Soviet foreign policy decision-making, it is worth mentioning that a handful of Soviet defectors reported Stalin had wanted a deal with Hitler for some time before August 1939. Among them was the Soviet chargé d'affaires in Rome, Leon B. Helphand, who defected to the West in summer 1940. However, the first published claim that Stalin preferred a deal with Hitler to one with the Western powers was made by Walter Krivitsky, the head of Soviet military intelligence in Western Europe, then Spain, until his defection in 1937, when he feared the Stalinist purges would engulf him as well. Krivitsky published a series of articles in the *Saturday Evening Post* in April 1939 asserting that Stalin had sought an agreement with Nazi Germany since 1934. Later, he publicized the theory—shared by Polish statesmen and some Western observers—that Soviet negotiations for an alliance with France and Britain were a fraud. In support of this claim, Krivitsky adduced Stalin's refusal to believe in a German threat to the USSR. According to Krivitsky, when the German-Soviet trade-credit agreement was concluded in April 1935, Stalin said that Hitler could not make war on the USSR—because German business circles were too powerful to allow it. Krivitsky also claimed that the head of the Soviet trade delegation in Berlin, David Kandelaki, brought with him the draft of a German-Soviet agreement when he re-

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37. For names of visitors in Stalin's appointment book for 1938–1939, see "Posetiteli kremlevskogo kabineta I.V. Stalina. Zhurnaly (Tetradi) Zapisy lits priniatiykh pervym gensekom, 1924–1953," *Istoricheskii Arkhiv*, no. 5–6 (Moscow, 1995): 5–63, [henceforth: IA 1995, no. 5–6]. On declassified documents and general comments on Russian archives, Raymond L. Garthoff, "Some Observations on Using the Soviet Archives," *Diplomatic History*, no. 5 (1997): 243–258; also Michael David Fox and David Hoffmann, "The Politburo Protocols, 1919–49," *The Russian Review*, vol. 55 (1996): 99–103.

turned to Moscow in April 1937.<sup>38</sup> If there was such a draft, it did not survive in German archives, though German documents record Soviet soundings of Germany in 1935–36. Thus, on May 8, 1935, Litvinov told the German ambassador in Moscow, Count Friedrich Werner von der Schulenburg, that since the Soviet Union had signed an alliance with France, he hoped it would soon be followed by a general nonaggression agreement, “of the kind suggested by Germany.” This would, said Molotov, lessen the significance of the Franco-Soviet pact and lead to the improvement of German-Soviet relations, “which the Soviet Government desired above all things and which they now considered possible.”<sup>39</sup> This proposal was made just six days after the signature of the Franco-Soviet alliance in Paris and eight days before the signature of the Czechoslovak-Soviet alliance in Prague. German documents also show that in late 1936, Kandelaki told Hjalmar Schacht, head of the Reichsbank, that the Soviet government had never refused political negotiations with Germany and had even made concrete proposals to improve them at the time of the negotiations for the Franco-Soviet pact—a passage that German Foreign Minister Baron Konstantin von Neurath underlined, adding a question mark. Kandelaki declared that

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38. Uldricks dismisses this testimony because it was given by lower-level Soviet functionaries, whose information was speculative and because, as defectors, they had rejected the Stalinist system, see Uldricks in Gorodetsky, *Soviet Foreign Policy*, 69; and 74, note 14. For Krivitsky's account, see Walter Krivitsky, *I Was Stalin's Agent* (New York, 1940). For Stalin's reaction to the German-Soviet trade agreement, and Kandelaki bringing a draft agreement, *ibid.*, 31, 38. The book was first published in London, in 1939, titled, *In Stalin's Secret Service* (reprint, New York, 2000). The Russian translation of this edition has an extensive supplement with materials on and by Krivitsky, also documents selected and annotated by Aleksandr Kolpakidi, with photographs and short biographies of people figuring in the book, see Val'ter Krivitsky, *Ja byl agentom Stalina. Zapiski sovetskogo razvednika* (Moscow, 1996). Walter Krivitsky (Samuel Ginsberg, 1889–1941), gave testimony to a congressional committee. He was found dead in room 532, Bellevue Hotel, Washington, D.C. on February 10, 1941, see Flora Lewis, “Who Killed Krivitsky?” *Washington Post*, 13 February 1966), reprint, Krivitsky, *In Stalin's Secret Service* (New York, 2000). Despite an alleged suicide note to Krivitsky's lawyer, it is very likely that the KGB murdered him.

39. Ambassador Schulenburg's report on his conversation with Litvinov, May 8, 1935, DGFP, ser. C, vol. IV, no. 78. Litvinov's mention of a German suggestion of a nonaggression pact referred to a vague German proposal made to the British government as a counter to their proposal that Germany join the proposed Eastern Security Pact, see “Communique of the Official German News Agency,” 18 April 1935, *ibid.*, no. 29.



his government was ready to enter into open or secret German-Soviet negotiations to improve mutual relations, and on "general peace." However, Hitler rejected the idea, whose time, he said, had not yet come. But he also said that once Stalin showed himself the absolute master of Russia, and especially of the military, Germany would not pass up the opportunity.<sup>40</sup> German-Soviet negotiations for a new trade-credit agreement began in December 1938, with the signature of an agreement on methods of payment. At the turn of 1938-39, the German press toned down its attacks on the USSR and the Soviet press reciprocated. Trade negotiations proceeded in January 1939, but were suspended by the Germans later that month. They were to resume once more in July 1939, and this time they would pave the way to the nonaggression pact.

How can a convincing answer be found to the question of just when Stalin decided on an agreement with Hitler? Krivitsky dated Stalin's decision as far back as the summer of 1934. However that may be, it is clear there were Soviet soundings in 1935-36, but the purpose of this paper is to examine developments during the spring and summer of 1939. The best way to proceed is to survey the available evidence, though this does not require a detailed examination of all known documents. The course of Soviet-British-French negotiations on the one hand, and of Soviet-German talks on the other, has been well known for several decades from published German and British diplomatic documents, and later from French documents. These are now supplemented by selected Russian diplomatic documents. However, a brief outline will help follow what is, after all, a very complex story.

After the Soviet proposal of a conference of interested parties in Bucharest to discuss measures of preventing further German aggression, which was rejected by Britain, and after the failed British proposal of a declaration on consultation, Britain gave Poland a guarantee of the latter's independence

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40. See Schacht letter to Von Neurath, February 6, 1936, reporting his late December 1936 conversation with Kandelaki, also Neurath to Schacht, February 11, 1937, reporting Hitler's answer, *DGFP*, C, VI (London, Washington, 1983), nos. 183, 185. Whether or not these Soviet overtures were aimed at Hitler, or at German officials interested in renewing the former Rapallo/Berlin Treaty relationship, it is now clear that Czechoslovak President Edvard Beneš had nothing to do with provoking Stalin's purges of the Soviet officer corps, including Marshal Mikhail N. Tukhachevsky, by passing on a Gestapo-provided message on the marshal's alleged secret dealings with the Wehrmacht, see Igor Lukes, *Czechoslovakia Between Stalin and Hitler. The Diplomacy of Edvard Beneš in the 1930s* (Oxford, 1996), 99-107. It is likely that Stalin himself ordered his intelligence service in Germany to "leak" this message to the Gestapo, so he could use it to eliminate the popular Tukhachevsky, whom he may have seen as a rival for power.

on March 31, 1939, which was endorsed by Poland's ally France.<sup>41</sup> The unintended result was increased Soviet suspicion of both the Western powers and Poland. In the communist ideological framework, "bourgeois" states were always assumed as hostile to the world's only "socialist" state. Therefore, even before Hitler's seizure of the Czech lands in mid-March 1939, Stalin suspected the French and British of encouraging the Führer to attack the USSR. Indeed, Litvinov wrote the Soviet ambassador in London, Ivan M. Maisky, that Poland would give in to Hitler's demands, perhaps in return for Lithuania, and that Chamberlain wanted a German-Soviet war to break out over the Baltic States. Litvinov also wrote Iakov E. Suritz, the Soviet ambassador in Paris: "England has in fact concluded a treaty with Poland against us."<sup>42</sup> It is clear that since Stalin controlled Soviet foreign policy, Litvinov's communications to the ambassadors reflected the Soviet leader's views. Thus, the British guarantee and then the provisional Anglo-Polish mutual assistance agreement of April 6 fueled Stalin's suspicions of a Western plot to provoke a German attack on the USSR.

Soviet negotiations with the British and French governments began in earnest in mid-April, but after the Western powers finally agreed to guarantee Latvia, Estonia, and Finland, (though not Lithuania, which did not border on the USSR and for which the latter did not demand a guarantee), negotiations bogged down over the issue of "indirect aggression." This meant the Soviet right to military intervention in these states if Moscow perceived a threat to Soviet security, and this even if the above states were not overtly threatened but changed their policy of their own volition. Stalin's fears were strengthened when Germany signed nonaggression pacts with Estonia and Latvia in June 1939. The French and British governments, for their part, opposed the Soviet definition of indirect aggression because they wished to keep the door open to a peaceful solution of the German demands on

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41. The guarantee was not Chamberlain's "spontaneous" reaction to his personal humiliation by Hitler, when the latter seized the Czech lands in mid-March 1939, nor did the prime minister fail to consult his advisers and the Foreign Office, as one historian contends, e.g. Gorodetsky, *Grand Illusion*, p. 4 and note 7. On the British road to the guarantee and its meaning, see Anna M. Cienciala, "Poland in British and French Policy in 1939: Determination to Fight or Avoid War?" *Polish Review*, vol. 34, no.3 (1989): 199–226; slightly abbreviated reprint in Patrick Finney, ed., *The Origins of the Second World War* (London, New York, Sidney and Auckland, 1997), 413–432.

42. Litvinov's letter of April 4, 1939 to Maisky on suspicions of Chamberlain's motives, and his letter of April 11 to Suritz on an Anglo-Polish treaty directed against the USSR, *SPE*, nos. 145, and 157. See also Litvinov to Stalin, 9 April 1939, in which the former denigrated French Foreign Minister Georges Bonnet's proposal for Franco-Soviet talks to clarify measures to be taken in case of a German attack on Poland, *DVP* 1939 I, no. 206.

Poland. Furthermore, Chamberlain did not want to lose the support of neutral countries, especially the United States, by sacrificing the Baltic States to the USSR. French Foreign Minister G. Bonnet, though strongly in favor of a triple alliance between London, Paris, and Moscow as a deterrent to Hitler, also opposed the Soviet demand. Nevertheless, in late July, the British and French proposed a secret protocol specifying Soviet intervention if any of these states were threatened, as Czechoslovakia had been in March 1939, but with consultation in other cases. Later, they agreed to the inclusion of this provision in the alliance treaty, and lastly to the Soviet demand for a military alliance. They decided to send a joint French-British military mission to Moscow to negotiate the alliance, assuming the political agreement would be negotiated at the same time. These negotiations began on August 12 but were suspended on August 17, allegedly over the Polish refusal to allow the passage of Soviet troops in case of war with Germany. They were finally broken off by the Soviet side on August 25, two days after the signature of the Nazi-Soviet pact. It is worth noting that France, an ally of the USSR since 1935, always showed more interest than Britain in a concrete military agreement with Moscow, as well as willingness to override Polish objections to the passage of Soviet troops through Poland. Indeed, the French premier and war minister, Edouard Daladier, gave the French government's consent to this Soviet demand on August 21, without Polish agreement. However, French offers were routinely ignored by Stalin.<sup>43</sup> Meanwhile, German-Soviet talks began on April 17 and, as early as May 20, Molotov indicated interest in a political agreement with Germany. The Germans, while showing much interest, were put off by Molotov's rough insistence that Berlin first fulfill all Soviet economic demands as stipulated by the commissar for foreign trade, Mikoyan. Above all, they feared that Stalin might trick them, so they suspended political talks in late June. However, they proposed conditions for a trade-credit agreement in early July, which were favorably received in Moscow. Preliminary talks began in Berlin in late July, at the same time outlining the basis for a political treaty, after which matters progressed rapidly. A trade-credit agreement was signed

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43. For a succinct presentation of French efforts to secure a separate agreement on military cooperation with the USSR, and French pressure for the conclusion of the triple alliance, see Jean-Baptiste Duroselle, *La Décadence 1932-1939* (Paris, 1979), ch. XIII, 405-440. For French-Polish relations in the period March-end August 1939, see Waclaw Jędrzejewicz, ed., *Diplomat in Paris 1936-1939. Papers and Memoirs of Juliusz Łukasiewicz Ambassador of Poland* (New York and London, 1970), 173-271; Polish text in revised and expanded edition, Waclaw Jędrzejewicz and Henryk Bułhak, eds., *Dyplomata w Paryżu 1936-1939. Wspomnienia i dokumenty Juliusza Łukasiewicza Ambasadora Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej* (London, 1989), pt. II, 213-322. On Daladier and Poland in late August 1939, see discussion of Anglo-French-Soviet negotiations, Moscow, later in this paper.